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What You Need to Know About Breaking a Fever

Medically reviewed by Angelica Balingit, MD — By Tom Rush — Updated on January 18, 2024

Breaking a fever Symptoms How to take a temperature
Seeking help

You may be able to break a fever at home with rest, hydration, and over-the-counter medications. But a person with a high fever may need medical attention.

People may refer to a fever as hyperthermia, pyrexia, or elevated temperature. It is a state of heightened body temperature commonly occurring as a reaction to an illness. Fevers can also result from sunburn or from getting immunizations.

People with compromised immune systems may tend to have fevers more often than others.

Fevers are typically temporary and resolve independently. However, severe fevers can indicate a serious underlying condition and be a medical emergency.

This article discusses how to assess a fever's severity and ways to break a fever at home.

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How do you break a fever?

If you or someone you're caring for has a fever, follow these steps to break the fever:

- Stay in bed and rest.
- Keep hydrated by drinking plenty of water to replenis
- Take over-the-counter medications like acetaminophe fever.

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- Avoid contact with others until the fever resolves.

How long does it take to break a fever?

Most fevers go away on their own within a few days. That said, in cases of severe or persistent fever, emergency assistance may be necessary.

Other symptoms

Fevers aren't one-size-fits-all, and neither are their sympto
comfort level and symptoms can help you decide how to tr

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- weakness
- lightheadedness
- loss of appetite
- headache
- muscle aches
- sweating
- chills
- nausea
- vomiting
- rash

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Temperature taking 101

A person's body average body temperature can vary depending on age, sex, activity level, and the site at which a temperature is taken. For example, a body temperature reading at a person's ear, mo
will yield different results.

Below are average body temperature values by demogra
temperature site.

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0–12 months	95.8–99.3°F (36.7–37.3°C)	96.8–100.3°F (37–37.9°C)	94.8–98.3°F (36.4–37.3°C)
Children	97.6–99.3°F (36.4–37.4°C)	98.6–100.3°F (37–37.9°C)	96.6–98.3°F (35.9–36.83°C)
Adults	96–98°F (35.6–36.7°C)	97–99°F (36.1–37.2°C)	95–97°F (35–36.1°C)
Adults over age 65	93–98.6°F (33.9–37°C)	94–99.6°F (34.4–37.6°C)	92–97.6°F (33.3–36.4°C)

Learn more about body temperature and its measurement here.

Many pediatricians recommend using rectal thermometers for infants and babies. Discuss with your doctor which type of thermometer to use. You should also tell them what kind of thermometer you used to record your child's temperature.

Temperature ranges for fever

Below are typical body temperature ranges that may indicate fever in adults:

- **Low fever:** 99.1–100.4°F (37.3–38.0°C)
- **Moderate fever:** 100.6–102.2°F (38.1–39.0°C)
- **High fever:** 102.4–105.8°F (39.1–41°C)
- **Hyperthermia:** Greater than 105.8°F (41°C)

The average body temperature of children and toddlers is around 97.52°F (36.4°C) but this can vary depending on a child's age, health status, and thermometer location.

Similarly to adults, temperatures around 38°C and above m
fever.

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When to contact a doctor

How and when you should treat a fever can vary dependin
age and associated symptoms. If left untreated, fever can l
complications in young children, older adults, and people v

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Adults with a fever and other symptoms, such as a stiff neck, severe pain anywhere in the body, or shortness of breath, should seek immediate medical attention.

Similarly, if your fever goes above 103°F (39.4°C) or doesn't respond to treatment, it may be best to seek medical assistance.

Infants and toddlers

A doctor should see infants up to 3 months old with a fever of 100.4°F (38°C) or above. They should still see a doctor even if there are no other symptoms present.

Babies 3 to 6 months old may not require treatment for fevers up to 102°F (38.9°C). If your baby has other symptoms or their fever goes above 102°F (38.9°C), call your doctor.

Immunocompromized states

If you have a weakened immune system and start experiencing fever, seek medical assistance. A compromised immune system is common in people with HIV, cancer, or autoimmune diseases.

Fever is often a sign of infection. Sometimes, these infections are fast-moving or hard to treat. So if you have a compromised immune system, getting immediate medical support for fever is important.

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How to Treat a Viral Fever at Home

Medically reviewed by Debra Rose Wilson, Ph.D., MSN, R.N., IBCLC, AHN-BC, CHT — By Corinne O'Keefe Osborn — Updated on February 13, 2023

Warning signs Hydration Rest OTC drugs Herbal remedies Cooling tips Takeaway

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How we vet brands and products

Unlike bacteria, viruses don't respond to antibiotics. In most cases, viral illnesses simply have to run their course. Staying hydrated or using over-the-counter fever-reducing medications can help until it resolves.

A viral fever is any fever that happens as a result of a viral infection. Viruses are tiny germs that spread easily from person to person.

When you contract a viral condition, such as a cold or flu, your immune system responds by going into overdrive. Part of this response often involves raising your body's temperature to make it less hospitable to the virus and other germs.

Most people's usual body temperature is around 98.6°F (37°C). Anything 1 degree or more above this is considered a fever. A fever ca
anywhere from a couple of days to a week or longer, depe
type of infection causing it.

While the virus runs its course, there are several things you

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Know when to see your doctor

Fevers usually aren't something to worry about. But when they're high enough, they can pose some health risks.

For children

A high fever can be more dangerous for a young child than an adult. Here's when to call your child's doctor:

- **Children ages 0 to 3 months:** Rectal temperature is 1
  or higher.

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- **Children ages 6 to 24 months:** Rectal temperature is above 102°F (39°C) that lasts for more than a day. If they have other symptoms, such as a rash, cough, or diarrhea, you may want to call sooner.

For children 2 and older, call their doctor if they have a fever that repeatedly rises above 104°F (40°C). Also seek medical advice if your child has a fever and:

- They seem unusually lethargic and irritable or have other severe symptoms.
- The fever lasts longer than three days.
- The fever doesn't respond to medication.
- They don't maintain eye contact with you.
- They can't keep fluids down.

For adults

Fevers can also be risky for adults in some cases. See your doctor for a fever that's 103°F (39°C) or higher that isn't responding to medication or lasts longer than three days. Also seek treatment if a fever is accompanied by:

- severe headache
- rash
- sensitivity to bright light
- stiff neck
- frequent vomiting
- trouble breathing
- chest or abdominal pain
- convulsions or seizures

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A viral fever makes your body much warmer than usual. This causes your body to sweat in an effort to cool down. But this leads to fluid loss, which can cause dehydration.

Try to drink as much as you can when you have a viral fever to replenish lost fluids. It doesn't have to be just water, either. Any of the following can provide hydration:

- juice
- sports drinks
- broths
- soups
- decaffeinated tea

Babies and toddlers may benefit from a specially formulated drink with electrolytes, such as Pedialyte. You can purchase these drinks at a local grocery store or online. You can also make your own electrolyte drink at home.

Get plenty of rest

A viral fever is a sign that your body is working hard to fight off an infection. Cut yourself some slack by resting as much as possible. Even if you can't spend the day in bed, try to avoid as much physical activity as possible. Aim for eight to nine hours or more of sleep per night. During the day, take it easy.

It's also best to put your exercise routine on a temporary hold. Exerting yourself can further raise your temperature.

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Take an over-the-counter medication

Over-the-counter (OTC) fever reducers are the easiest way to manage a fever. In addition to temporarily reducing your fever, they'll help you feel a little less uncomfortable and more like yourself.

Just make sure you keep getting plenty of rest, even if you feel better for a few hours after taking an OTC drug.

Common OTC fever reducers include:

- acetaminophen (Tylenol, Children's Tylenol)
- ibuprofen (Advil, Children's Advil, Motrin)
- aspirin
- naproxen (Aleve)

Before you turn to OTC fever reducers, keep this safety information in mind:

- Never give aspirin to children. It can greatly increase the risk of Reye's syndrome, a rare but very serious condition.
- Don't take more than what's recommended by the manufacturer. Doing so can lead to stomach bleeding, liver damage, or kidney problems.
- Jot down the time when you take an OTC medication so you can make sure you don't take too much in a 24-hour period.

Try herbal remedies

People sometimes try herbal remedies to treat a fever. Kee
these supplements have been shown to improve fever in a
no reliable evidence that they work in humans. Their safety
often unclear or unknown, too. It's best to avoid these reme

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monitor the quality of supplements like they do for drugs. Talk to your doctor before trying any supplements. Follow the manufacturer's instructions.

Moringa

Moringa is a tropical plant that has a variety of nutritional and medicinal benefits. Almost all parts of the plant contain vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and antibacterial agents. A 2014 study found that moringa bark reduced fevers in rabbits.

More research is needed to determine how this plant can reduce fevers in humans. Some research suggests it may be gentler on the liver than over-the-counter medication such as acetaminophen.

Don't use moringa if you:

- are pregnant
- take medications that are substrates of cytochrome P450, such as lovastatin (Altoprev), fexofenadine (Allegra), or ketoconazole (Nizoral)

In one case report, consumption of moringa leaves lead to a rare disease of the skin and mucous membranes called Stevens-Johnson syndrome (SJS). This suggests people at risk of developing SJS should avoid using moringa. However, this was the first reported case and the reaction should be considered extremely rare.

Kudzu root

Kudzu root is an herb used in traditional Chinese medicine. inflammatory properties and may help reduce pain. A 2012 suggests that it reduced fevers in rats, but human studies a evaluate this properly.

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- take tamoxifen
- have hormonal-sensitive cancer, such as ER-positive breast cancer
- take methotrexate (Rasuvo)

If you take diabetes medications, talk to your doctor before trying kudzu root. It may lead to low blood sugar, requiring a change in medication.

You can find kudzu root in the form a powder, capsule, or liquid extract online.

Stay cool

You can help cool down your body by surrounding it with cooler temperatures. Make sure you don't overdo it. If you start to shiver, stop immediately. Shivering can cause your fever to rise.

Things you can do to safely cool off include the following:

- Sit in a bath of lukewarm water, which will feel cool when you have a fever. (Cold water will actually cause your body to warm up instead of cool down.)
- Give yourself a sponge bath with lukewarm water.
- Wear light pajamas or clothing.
- Try to avoid using too many extra blankets when you have chills.
- Drink plenty of cool or room-temperature water.
- Eat popsicles.
- Use a fan to keep air circulating.

The bottom line

A viral fever is usually nothing to worry about. In both child
most viruses resolve on their own and are part of the healir

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